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ABSTRACT

A project initiated by the Auburn University (Alabama) program in music education in the College of Education and the Auburn University Cooperative Extension Service brought together school and community groups from targeted communities in Alabama to plan a conference to initiate thinking and develop action strategies for enriching the lives of at-risk youth through the arts. The impetus for the project arose from the school dropout rate of 24% for Alabama secondary students in 1989-1990. Planning sessions produced a conference outline focusing on four areas: (1) identify the target population for the conference; (2) conference agenda; (3) evaluate/synthesize conference results; and (4) expected outcomes. Communities organized in advance of the conference received data gathering kits organized into four parts, accompanying questions, and the process needed to answer the questions. The conference goals were to: (1) provide rationales for proposing the use of the arts to address problems of youth-at-risk and school dropouts; (2) begin or complete the inventory for resources found in the kit; and (3) begin networking activities. An evaluation of the conference suggested participants believed in the role of the arts in working with at-risk youth and in the relevance to their community. The action phase of the process continued in each of the communities and addressed future directions from this work. (CK)

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Presented at the annual meeting of the
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The Arts and the At-Risk Child: A School and Community Partnership

by
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Presented at the annual meeting of the
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San Francisco, California
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Project Overview

The Auburn University program in Music Education in the College of Education and the Auburn University Cooperative extension service have begun a project that addresses the problem of youth at risk. The approach is the application of education and experience in the arts within a nurturing environment through a cooperative and collaborative program between schools and communities. The program model is based on the concept that a child, in order to receive adequate nurturing toward the end of leading a successful life, must receive help, encouragement, and support from three societal anchors—parents, schools, and community. The concept further acknowledges that a child has a good chance of success when support is obtained from at least two of the three anchors. However, at-risk youth are often observed to receive little or no support from any of these three vitalities.

The designers of this project decided to concentrate on enhancing the effect of the schools and communities. The schools are extant and have as their mission to enhance and nurture the lives of children. They have the potential to offer a variety of arts courses and experiences because the arts are officially acknowledged in state courses of study and approved, and in some states required, components of the school curriculum. Additionally, communities are dynamic entities that produce the children constituting the population of interest. Further, most communities are composed of some members who

realize the economic, political, and moral need to make all of its citizen productive and successful. There are rich resources of individuals and groups capable and interested in fostering activities and learning in the arts. However, the parent dimension, although perhaps the most vital, was considered too specialized requiring individual attention that goes beyond the capabilities and resources of the project.

The project brought together school and community groups from targeted communities in Alabama for a planning conference designed to initiate thinking and develop action strategies for enriching the lives of at-risk youth through the arts. The project is ongoing and follow-up activities and strategies are developing and emerging.

Background of the Project

The social and economic dilemma emitting from the school dropout problem and its precursor, the at-risk phenomenon, has been garnering attention at the national level of business leaders, politicians, educational planners, and researchers. A number of studies in the 70s and 80s have contributed to profiling, early identification, intervention strategies, restructuring the school environment, and adapting the curriculum. Economic realities and international competition have spawned calls for educational reform. New regulations and laws have required local and state education agencies to develop plans that will change public education in light of these needs.

The State of Alabama's concern arises from the approximately 13,050 students who drop out of grades 9-12 each year compared to the 1989-90 graduation total of 42,475. This translates into a dropout rate of for secondary students of approximately 24%. School administrators have been given a mandate by the State Department of Education to develop plans within the next two years that will positively address the needs of at-risk students. Those failing to do so risk losing state accreditation. The Coordinator of Counseling and Career Guidance at the Alabama State Department of Education

indicated that few superintendents have made any move to meet this requirement. Perhaps they are waiting to see what someone else develops.

Early attempts in at-risk planning by a few Alabama administrators are dealing exclusively with altering the school environment by forming alternative schools, i.e., schools that separate a certain category of students from the main student body by placing them in separate buildings or separate classes. Because of the predicted "follow-suit" mentality and the established direction of some early efforts in at-risk planning, it is feared that this opportunity for promoting and implementing other and perhaps equally or more substantive and effective approaches will be lost. Thus, the timing and effect of this conference, which proposed to explore at-risk planning from a curricular/community-action platform rather than an environmental perspective, was critical.

The opportunity was given to establish a philosophical orientation and provide practical guidelines for school and community approaches that included involvement in the arts and dealt with the at-risk/dropout student in the State. The school establishment and community leaders, provided with no opportunity to benefit from current thinking and research, will likely provide a system with minimal positive consequence at best or negative consequence at worst. The State of Alabama can afford neither. Therefore, a platform from which to launch alternative approaches, e.g., the community-school partnership involving the arts, was a critical need.

Philosophical Orientation

Because the project was to consider the role of the school curriculum and community support in meeting the needs of at-risk youth specifically and of all youth in general, the philosophical orientation was pinned to the writings of Howard Gardner, specifically his theory of seven basic, autonomous intelligences.

Within the context of multiple intelligences, the arts assume a level of importance not normally associated with curriculum planning and analysis of student needs. Gardner lists musical, spatial, social, introspective, and kinesthetic intelligences as co-equal with linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. Because of individual student differences, educators have the opportunity and responsibility to tailor educational institutions that reflect the diverse interests and abilities found among the students. No discipline or subject is a frill. Each potentially provides the "way through" the educational struggle for some group of students. Educational planners, community leaders, parents, and students must be brought to realize the human potential in each basic intelligence.

Arguments for the value of teaching to each basic intelligence has been formed by the Center for Arts in the Basic Curriculum (CABC). It believes that the arts are central to the public school curriculum. The arts are effective motivators, and when schools drop the arts from their budgets their students lose enthusiasm for learning. Programs that attempt to motivate students in an atmosphere void of the arts fail to deal with the root causes of why students become disheartened with schooling. "Arts connect school to community and the importance of everyday life of adults, and when dropped fail to teach respect for the parts of every day life that are an art and not a science." A responsible citizenry is dependent upon students educated in a well-rounded course of study.

Traditional schooling works well for motivated students, but fails many, especially the disadvantaged. The CABC noted that schools that include the arts as a part of the basic curriculum show substantially higher test scores and lower drop-out rates. Their graduates are skilled in creative thinking. Students become motivated to learn and business experience lower cost in training beginning employees in basic skills. These results accrue because participation in the arts demands active rather than passive

participation. Students are encouraged to reason holistically and develop critical and creative thinking skills.

If the arts are the first dimension of the youth-and-at-risk project, then community is the second. The anticipated direction was two-way. The community becomes involved in the school through mobilization of community resources, and the school become involved in the community by becoming more responsive to its concerns. Expanding schooling into the community fosters lifelong learning and community-building. Expanding the arts from the community into the school results in an enriched educational setting and the school becoming the center of benefits for the community.

The timing of the conference also came when new courses of study in music and art were being released by the State Department of Education. The SDE is planning a series of administrator workshops during the 1991 summer to orient them to these and other courses of study. Because the project was to begin with a conference of educators, community leaders, and business interest, the meeting would be an ideal preparation for participation by teachers and administrators in these workshops and for providing for the conference participants insight into how these subject areas can contribute to a curricular approach to at-risk planning.

Project Development and Team Formation

The arts and youth-at-risk project in Alabama, although first conceived by music educators, quickly found an ally in the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, an agency serving the U.S. Department of Agriculture and federally funded. The alliance formed because the music educators, encouraged by their national organization the Music Educators National Conference, and the extension service personnel, encouraged by the Department of Agriculture, adopted the national agenda of youth-at-risk. Also, the desire of the educators to utilize community resources more effectively in the offering of all fine arts programs and the desire of the Extension Service to increase the role of their

community based programs for youth in the schools, such as 4H, led to a pooling of resources and expertise to develop the first phase of the community/arts plan. After several planning sessions, the following conference outline was adopted.

Project Outline

A. Identify the Target Population for the Conference.
   1. Alabama public school administrators.
   2. Alabama Cooperative Extension Service personnel.
   3. Alabama public school arts teachers.
   4. Representatives of Alabama business and industry.
   5. Representatives of the Alabama Association of School Boards.
   6. School personnel from surrounding states.
   7. State Board of Education members.
   8. Social services providers.
   9. Community and state business leaders.
   10. Representatives of the State legislature.
   11. University faculty and educational extension leaders.
   12. Teams organized from target counties.

B. Conference Agenda
   1. General Session—Students at Risk: A Profile of the Nation
      a. Follow-up Session—Profile of the at-risk elementary-age student in the school and community
      b. Follow-up Session—Profile of the at-risk/dropout secondary-age student in the school and community
   2. General Session—The Role of Artistic Intelligences
      a. Follow-up Session—Planning for a Balanced Curriculum: A School and Community Partnership (concurrent elementary and secondary sessions)

b. Follow-up Session—Models for Success (concurrent elementary and secondary sessions)

3. General Session—What Next?: Perspectives on Alabama's Future

a. The Local At-Risk Plan

b. The Community School Partnership

c. A Plan for Action: Alabama's Future

C. Evaluate/Synthesize Conference Results

D. Expected Outcomes

1. Define specific needs for serving the at-risk/dropout student.
2. Provide practical guidelines for school and community approaches that include involvement in the arts and deal with the at-risk/dropout student.
3. Promote communication among educators, extension personnel, and public sector leaders concerned with meeting the needs of the at-risk/dropout student.
   a. establish network for exchange of ideas and information
   b. publish conference proceedings
   c. create newsletter to update progress in meeting State's "at-risk plan" mandate
4. Define goals and criteria for future action.
   a. curriculum
   b. special programs
   c. child needs
   d. school needs
   e. community needs

This organizational plan to implement this project outline by two heretofore unrelated and non communicating entities is represented in Figure 1

The communication lines in Figure 1 show the division of responsibility for communicating with potential project participants. Rather than indiscriminately inviting

anyone to attend, the planners decided to select target communities and schools districts in which the Extension Service directors believed that their county agents and related personnel would have some interest in promoting a project involving the arts for at-risk youth. Five counties were targeted which represented a cross section of rural to urban, wealthy to impoverished, and black to white demographic characteristics.

The music education faculty opened lines of communication with school personnel in the targeted counties. This included calls, letters, and meetings with to superintendents, principals, and fine arts teachers. They were informed of the project goals, objectives, and timelines. The school leaders were encouraged to form teams that would represent their school districts at the conference and provide financial assistance for travel, meals, and housing.

The Extension personnel mobilized their county offices. Central control from the state director's office in Auburn over the county agents was an advantage in organizing and requiring participation in the project. The county agents contacted community representative including business and industry leaders, officers of the juvenile court and police agencies, social service providers, housing project directors, and arts association leaders. In addition, they also contacted the school leaders to reinforce the contacts made by the university music education faculty. This latter contact was important to underscore to the school superintendents and principals that community involvement was to be an important dimension of the arts and youth-at-risk project.

In some instances, the school and community teams were mobilized in advance of the conference and preliminary meetings were held so that the conference organizers could travel to the community to explain the short and long term goals and to begin advance data gathering procedures.

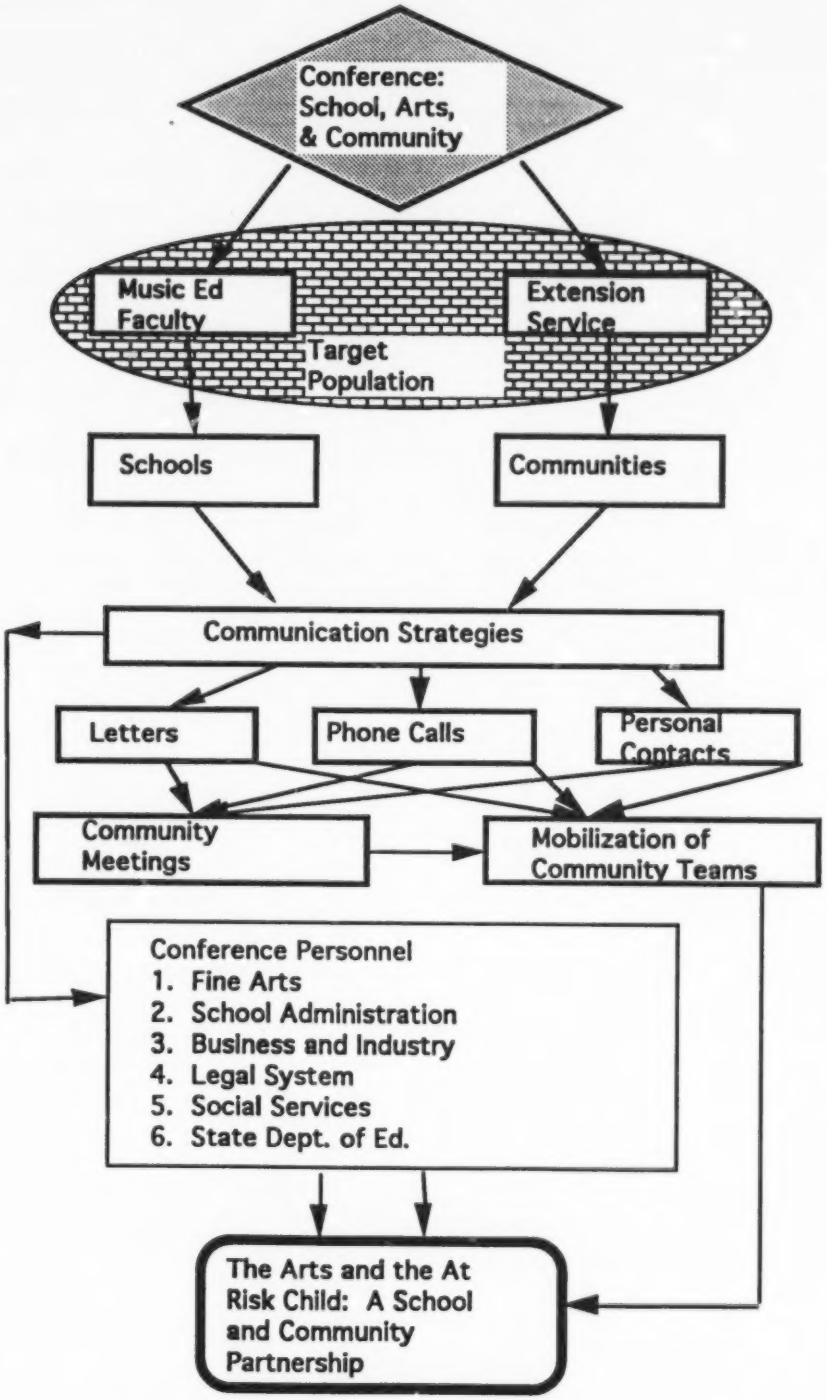

Figure 1. Action plan to organize conference on The Arts and the At Risk Child: A School and Community Partnership.

Advance Data Gathering

Before any action plan for utilizing the arts in communities working with at-risk youth could be implemented, a vast amount of information was needed. Where communities could be organized in advance of the conference, the data gathering process was begun when they received their "Conference Planning and Team Process Kit." Those communities that were not organized began their assessment processes at the conference.

The process kit was organized into four steps, each one accompanied by the questions to be answered and the steps taken to answer the questions.

TEAM PROCESS KIT

TEAM LEADER INSTRUCTIONS

STEP I: Identify Community/School Participants—*Who Should be involved?*

A. List various community/school agencies that should be represented.

Ask team members to identify various community/school agencies that should be represented (such as church and civic groups, business, local government, law enforcement, school board members, school administrators, teachers, etc.) and list those agencies on the numbered lines of Part I of the worksheet. Attach additional sheets if needed.

B. List specific groups within your community which are representative of each agency listed in Item A.

Ask team members to identify specific groups within your community for each of the agencies listed. List as many groups as possible for each agency (such as various church congregations, different civic groups, etc.). List these groups on the lettered lines under the corresponding agency.

C. List at least three different individuals for each of the groups listed in Item A.

Ask team members to identify at least three different people for each of the groups listed in Item A. Use these names to develop a "List of Participants." Include the group affiliation, address, and work and home telephone numbers on the list. Attach additional sheets as needed.

D. Contact individuals listed, explain the nature of the project and ask if they are willing to be involved.

Divide the "List of Participants" among team members so that everyone on the list will be contacted.

STEP II. Identify the Roles of These Participants—*How will they be involved?*

A. Identify responsibilities and objectives for each agency listed on Part I of the worksheet.

Ask team members to identify the role of each community agency listed in Part I and write that role by the corresponding number on Part II of the worksheet.

B. Identify responsibilities and objectives for each group listed on Part I of the worksheet.

Ask team members to identify the role of each group listed in Part I and write that role by the corresponding letter on Part II of the worksheet.

STEP III. Setting the Mechanisms to Begin the School/Community Partnership

A. Conducting the Arts Personnel Inventory

What individuals or agencies are available in and to the community who are possible resources in working with fine arts programs? Look for people and groups involved in music, visual arts, dance, drama, arts and crafts, folk art, etc.

1. Schools
2. Community agencies (refer to your list from steps I and II)
3. Parents
4. Students
5. Fine Arts Specialists
6. Government Agents

B. Conducting the Arts Facilities Inventory

Where can fine arts activities be conducted? What spaces are available?

1. Schools
2. Churches
3. Businesses
4. Homes
5. Governmental Agencies

C. Constructing the Fine Arts Calendar

What goes on, and when, in the community and nearby.

1. Regular community events (including churches)
2. Regular school events
3. Regular extra-community events

STEP IV. Techniques and Procedures to Make the Partnership Work

A. Finding fine arts programs especially suited for involving the at-risk child.

What and where are the fine arts programs like that make a difference with at-risk children?

1. Searching the school
2. Searching the community
3. Searching the literature
4. Searching the imagination

B. Promoting arts programs to include at-risk children.

How can at-risk children be encouraged to participate in fine arts programs?

How can the school and community be encouraged to include fine arts programs as an at-risk intervention strategy?

C. Supporting arts programs that include at-Risk children.

What kind of support can be given when fine arts programs are utilized to involve at-risk children?

1. Children
2. Teachers
3. Parents
4. Agencies

D. Supporting at-risk children involved in arts programs.

How can all children receive support when participating in fine arts activities?

1. A plan for recognition and valuing.
2. A plan for financial backing.

E. Building the school/community fine arts network.

What plans can be developed to implement the fine arts/community plan.

1. Communication
2. Publicity

3. Performances and presentations

F. Enriching the community arts environment

How can the community make its fine arts program grow?

1. Adding instructional programs for youth and adults.
2. Bringing in guest artists and performers.
3. Utilizing available talent and resources.

The Conference Agenda

The purposes of the conference were, first, to provide the psychological, philosophical, economic, sociological, and educational rationales for proposing the use of the arts at an approach to addressing of the youth-at-risk and the school drop out problem. Second, the participants from the targeted counties were to complete or begin and make provisions for completing the inventory of resources called for in the "Process Kit." Third, the conferees were to begin networking activities that would form the basis for future communication and sharing of personnel and experiences. The timeline for accomplishing these three purposes in contained the following conference agenda.

Conference Schedule

Monday

9:00 a.m.

Opening and Welcome
Assistant Dean for Education
Extension, Public Service, & Development
College of Education

Vice-President for Extension
Auburn, University

Opening Address:
"The State, and Community: The Economics of Educating At-Risk Children"
Becky Dunn, Russell Corporation

Responses:
"The View from Education"
Robert E. Johnson, College of Education
Assoc. Professor of Music Education

"The View from the Community"
Susan Raftery
Alabama Cooperative Extension Service
Extension Community Development Specialist

10:45 **The Arts in General Education**
Mary Frances Early
Atlanta Public Schools

11:30 **State of Arts Education in Alabama**
Betty Perdue
Alabama State Dept. of Education

12 noon Lunch & Program
Opelika High School Guitar Class

1:30 **Identifying Students At Risk**
"The Education Perspective"
Mr. Jimmy Jacobs
State Department of Education

"The Community Perspective"
Judge Richard Lane
Lee County Justice Center

2:30 **Team Process Time**
Identifying Community/School Participants

4:30 **Team Reports**

7:30 **The Legislative Agenda for Schools**
Senator Ted Little

Arts Informance
"Enhancing Self-Esteem of At-Risk Children through Arts-Learning"
Patt Yuhasz, University of Alabama

Tuesday
9:00 **Team Process Time**
"Setting the Mechanisms to Begin the School/Community Partnership"

"Techniques and procedures to Make the Partnership Work"

10:20 **Team reports**

11:00 **Panel Discussion of Conference and Future Directions**

The conference accomplished all of its purposes. An evaluation of the conference by the participants revealed the following information:

1. Communities represented:

   11 counties were represented, the five targeted counties that formed teams to complete the process kits and representative form 6 other counties that responded to a general statewide mailing to notices to schools and county agents.

2. The session that was most useful:

   50% of the respondents valued the group process time and the working through the process kits to the most.

3. In relation to the education problems in my county, I believe the subject of this conference is:

   _83%_ very relevant _20%_ somewhat relevant _____not relevant

4. My level of interest in using the arts in working with the problem of at-risk children in my county is:

   _77%_ very interested _23%_ somewhat interested. _____not interested

5. The possibility of a partnership between community and school in my community is:

   _50%_ very strong _43%_ possible ___weak _____impossible

6. I would be interested in a follow-up to this conference:

   _90%_ YES _7%_ NO

These data suggest that those who attended the conference believe there is a role for the arts in working with at-risk youth and that the application of this concept is relevant their community situation. The respondents were also positive about the possibility of forming a partnership between the schools and the community to work with the at risk problem. Although those responding we somewhat more equivocal an this point, no felt that the possibility was weak or impossible.

Future Directions

The fourth element of the project outline presented earlier calls for defining goals and criteria for future action. They are to be stated in terms of curriculum, special

programs, child needs, school needs, and community needs. This is the action phase of the process and is now in progress to some degree in each of the communities. The specific needs are (1) engage one or more consultants who can travel to communities and serve as a catalyst to action and report to the university personnel who are monitoring progress of the project, (2) plan individual workshops for general and specific activities that community groups and schools can pursue, (3) utilize video-conferencing facilities in extension offices and schools to share ideas, solve problems, and expand the strategies of community/school arts programs to other counties and communities not involved in the original target groups, (4) publish a regular newsletter to link all participating communities into a unified network of action oriented advocates of providing educational opportunities to meet the needs of all children, and (5) communicate with action groups in other states to form a national coalition of action groups.